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Religion and the Magic Universe

In his seminal study on religion and the decline of magic in early modern England, Keith Thomas sketched an evolution in three phases.[1] In the Middle Ages, syncretism marked the relation between religion and magic; the church either assimilated magical powers or combated them with countermagic. This worldview was purified by both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation in a common acculturating effort. True religion was now defined as a matter of personal or collective faith and transcendental dogma, not of inner-worldly techniques for the control of a hostile world. A clear distinction thus was established between religion and magic, each now irreducible to the other. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries finally brought a new distribution of beliefs: religion and magic found themselves fraternally banished to a world of supernatural or irrational causality opposed to the sound reason that thenceforth guided science and technology.

The main outlines of Thomas's picture unquestionably remain valid. Yet his highly empirical approach to both magic and religion introduced some confusion as to whether the supernatural concerns magic as well as religion. Hildred Geertz has rightly pointed out that, for Thomas, magic seems to be a more or less fortuitous, imperfect, and prerational form of recourse to the supernatural in a field not yet covered by religion, which in turn appears as a more systematic, complete, and rational instrumentalization of the supernatural.[2] However, much more than Thomas suggested, magical beliefs and

techniques might have constituted a systematic pattern of cultural concepts and practices imbedded in a coherent worldview and differing from religion not only in degree and in complexity, but in nature. In fact, magic deals basically with the natural world, though in the eyes of the present-day reader, who is accustomed to a rationalized, restricted definition of the natural, it uses techniques that suggest transgressions of the rules of that world. Moreover, as a systematic worldview, magic changed throughout the medieval and early modern periods. The intellectual redefinition of religion fostered by the churches of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation involved a dramatic purification of religious ritual. Many forms of formerly religious ritual that had been rejected by the churches were subsequently absorbed by the world of magic, through a sort of reverse acculturation: healing techniques, divinatory astrology, judicial ordeals, and a variety of beliefs, such as those comprehending the intervention of spirits in everyday life. From this moment magic acquired in the eyes of the intellectual elite the image of a garbage can filled with irrational remainders of old beliefs. It may be assumed that at the same time the magic world-picture itself was changing. But the widening gulf between educated elites and the masses hindered the construction of a new intellectual framework for this magic universe.

When using the term "magic universe" rather than "magic," I do not want to suggest that magic is a system in itself, coherent in every way. I prefer this term because it suggests that magic is not something independent from the people's worldview, that is, the texture of mental faculties and categories with which reality can be perceived as meaningful and conceptualized. By "magic universe" I understand the magic world as a whole: the world-picture or worldview of the social groups concerned, the attitudes and daily practices involving the magical order, and finally the mutual relations between the two that make magical practices meaningful. In brief, it is the way people shape their lives from the central, predominant, and elaborated understanding that the world, our own world, is soaked with powers, beneficent or harmful, that can be mastered by using certain techniques, saying specific words, or performing particular rituals. Fundamentally the magic universe is an inner-worldly universe. The evil powers that can cause people so much harm are certainly strange, but they still pertain to our own world, to the earth and the cosmos (the physical universe) that we know from experience. We can name and master them.

Much harm, however, seems to have been done by the devil. The devil pertains to another universe, that of religion. The core of religion is the attribution to human life of meaning[3] defined as involvement in another, final reality. It tries to explain and resolve mischief by constructing two complementary worlds: our own, earthly world and the world beyond, known only by analogy.[4] The devil belongs to that other world, but operates in ours. That is why the figure of the devil could be appropriated by magic; he is one of the strongest embodiments of the harm that can be done in this world. The introduction of the religious demon into the old magic universe is plain proof of the success of Christianization, but at the same time it shows the extent to which such things could be mixed up in the early modern period.

This is perhaps the reason why this period so fascinates the historian of culture. At every step one encounters a mix of magical, religious, and learned world-pictures. However, it is extremely difficult to determine what originates in or pertains to each of the three, owing to their use of largely similar rituals. During the last decades, some historians have tried to separate a distinct popular culture from a learned or elite culture, sometimes not only as analytical categories, but also as realities.[5] In fact, although coexisting cultural systems often define themselves naturally as opposing each other, in practice they survive by supporting each other, as the medievalist Jean-Claude Schmitt has shown.[6] The problem is to know at what points they touch and penetrate each other and to discover which one exerts the decisive influence on the framework of a person's or a group's world-picture. Great cultural turning points in history do not create real dividing lines between such cultural systems, as for example between the magic universe and the skeptical, rational worldview from which certain elites would have started the process of their cultural emancipation. Moreover, it would be erroneous to think of these turning points in terms of sudden, collective shifts of whole populations toward new worldviews. In fact, the old and new perceptions of causality usually coexist within the same person, as is shown in the case of the great Isaac Newton. Newton was a protagonist of the new science, but through his alchemical cosmology was still somehow addicted to semimagical, or at least to analogical, explanations.[7]

Political aims could also be served by such ambiguity. According to Sir William Temple,[8] in 1676 the French minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, distributed among the participants at the peace negotiations

of Nijmegen a copy of a medieval prophecy sometimes attributed to Saint Thomas Becket,[9] asserting that the Lily (which means France) would dominate the Lion (which in this case means the Netherlands). This was more than a clever act of diplomacy. It suggests that as late as the 1670's a civil servant of the highest rank, a member of one of the moderately enlightened bourgeois elites, could still think of his fellow diplomats as sufficiently credulous believers in magical causality.

Such a multiple adherence is still more evident in the medical sector. In 1687 the Dutch Catholic archpriest Hugo Van Heussen (1654–1719), the son of a lawyer and a man who adhered to rational, even Jansenistic principles, sent his sister, who was quite ill, across the English Channel to be "touched"—and, he hoped, healed—by King James II.[10] Mentally, this was far from being a priest's rearguard action; he was merely following the advice of the best physicians. Furthermore, another Jansenistic priest, Van Heussen's cousin, Hugo Gael, attended the patient on her travels. Nearly three decades earlier, in 1660, King Charles II had performed a ceremony of the "royal touch" (the touching by the king of those suffering from scrofula)[11] at the court chapel of The Hague, under the troubled, but not altogether incredulous eyes of the Dutch upper class.[12]

Nowadays we use the term "therapeutic pluralism" to describe this ambiguous attitude toward diverging forms of healing. Medical systems are to be considered as action systems, the value of which primarily depends not on their theoretical or philosophical background, but on their de facto efficiency. That does not mean, however, that theory is rejected as useless or disregarded by the patient. Theory legitimates practice. Theoretical medicine has to certify the outcome of the healing process, by whatever expedient it might have been obtained. That is why, at least since the sixteenth century, miracles are recognized less and less by the Catholic Church unless a physician has officially certified the physical reality of the recovery: converted to a learned worldview, the hierarchical elite of the church refuses to accept the penetration of supernatural healing powers into the earthly reality unless rational medicine accounts for its efficiency.

So the members of the clerical elite have exchanged magical causality for scientific rationality. Thus, in 1700 when the Dutch apostolic vicar[13] Pieter Codde, himself a convinced Jansenist stemming from an Amsterdam family of merchants, attended a procession in honor of a miraculous statue of Our Lady in Brussels, [he]

exclaimed spontaneously in the presence of the nuncio: "Sono superstizioni, non vagliono niente!" ("That is superstition, it isn't worth anything!").[14] But 27 years later, the Jansenist schism of the Church of Utrecht having been accomplished, a 45-year old dropsical woman named Agatha Stouthandel was suddenly cured when she purposely touched the rochet of the new schismatic archbishop of Utrecht. Duly certified by the cured woman's family doctor, the miracle proclaimed and legitimated the divine mission of the new church, which called itself Old Catholic.[15] In this remake of the royal touch, the last remnants of magic have disappeared. The miracle is altogether a function of an ideological discourse; it is organized, certified, and properly exploited by the hierarchy of the church. It is a purely religious event; supernatural intervention is the only language of the argument.

But for a long time the worldview of enlightened elites was still influenced by magic; the incongruity of this influence was not perceived until far into the nineteenth century. A well-known example is the so-called maternal imagination, that is, the fear of pregnant women (and their entourages) that they would give birth to monsters after perceiving something monstrous or experiencing an emotional shock.[16] In the diary kept throughout her 52-year obstetrical practice by the Frisian midwife Catharina Schrader—whose sound reason, anatomical knowledge, and surgical skill proved several times to be superior to those of the local doctor of medicine and the surgeons—this fear of the maternal imagination appears as perhaps the last vestige of the magical worldview. When in 1710 a child was born with an open stomach, Schrader asked the mother if something had perturbed her mind. The mother answered that she had attended the slaughter of a pig and the opening of its belly.[17]

Translated into our language of worldview, this fear pertains to the magical order. It operates by inner-worldly analogy; the image of the "monster" seen by the pregnant woman—for example, a ghastly, staring cat or a handicapped man—transmits itself to the woman's intellect, whence it impresses itself on and transforms the "female sperm." This means that, like all other aspects of the magical worldview, such fears are closely related to knowledge about the human body and are therefore capable of influencing scientific knowledge, either magical or rational.[18] As long as people remained convinced that women contributed with their own sperm to the shaping of children, there continued to be a sound cognitive basis for such fears and for their integration into an otherwise rational worldview. Such

people included the learned surgeon of the same town, Tamme Visscher, who fourteen years earlier had published an iatromechanical treatise on the maternal imagination.[19] Irrational or incongruous elements in the rational worldview usually are not perceived as such until they have been eliminated. People always think their own worldview utterly coherent and rational. When speaking of the magic universe, we of course use an analytical concept; from the viewpoint of another rationality we interpret as magic what in former times seemed perfectly workable and rational.

The Emancipation Process: A Model

We may thus define the "magic universe" as a pattern of attitudes and practices that are of a magical order and draw their meaningful coherence from a magical worldview. Essentially an inner-worldly universe, the magical order (including witchcraft) appears opposed to the religious universe with its spiritual agency (including the devil and his powers). The emancipation process goes roughly from the magical order through the religious order toward the secular order, where neither witchcraft nor the devil appears as invested with real power capable of causing physical harm. It is the story of the gradual redistribution of the world into one hemisphere of facts and another of fiction.[20] The evolution of this discernment and indeed this new perception is the process of intellectual emancipation. In preindustrial societies knowledge was delegated to specific social groups; therefore social elites generally had earlier access to these tools than the common people. Because I want to discuss the breaking point in the perception of the universe, I shall limit my argument to the Dutch elites, roughly understood as those social groups that had received more than an elementary education—not more than 10 percent of the male population and far less of the female in the early modern period.[21]

To describe the process of emancipation of the elites, a model can be used that distinguishes among three dimensions, interactive with each other in the field of sociocultural dynamics. The first is the cognitive dimension, that is, the intellectual organization of the mind, consisting of the body of knowledge and the treasure of intellectual tools common to all who share a particular worldview. The second is the behavioral dimension, that is, the physical organization of human conduct, which determines in particular situations the efficiency and adequacy of actions proceeding from or related to the subject's world-

view. The third is the social dimension, that is, the cultural organization of community life, which checks individual or group attitudes and feelings (or patterns of belief and standards of action) against the life standards and values of a specific community, thus rendering a worldview not only workable for an individual or group, but also credible, transferable to others, and socially meaningful.

Cultural emancipation (the shift from one prevailing worldview to another) requires fundamental changes in the three dimensions simultaneously. It involves a transformation in the body of knowledge and the supply of intellectual tools by which knowledge is generated and made operational, such as skeptical or critical attitudes of mind, mathematical thinking, and the experimental method. It asks for a shift in patterns of action and styles of behavior. And it requires, at least to some extent, a formal reception by the community or a legitimization by the social group to which the actors pertain.

The inequalities in the evolution of the three dimensions over time account for the intricacy of the emancipation process. As I have shown, using the example of the maternal imagination, a major shift in the worldview calls for the (gradual) constitution of a new body of knowledge. But this new knowledge and the new ways of thinking are not always immediately translated into new patterns of action. Still more important, it may take a long time before those bodies of knowledge and patterns of action are accepted and assimilated by the entire community or all the social groups concerned. Reception and assimilation depend not only on a perceived intellectual interest—for example, the experiments with electricity in the eighteenth-century local academies—but also on a perceived professional interest. It sometimes took a very long time for medical, physical, and other discoveries to penetrate the realm of practical application, not because of a lack of interest, but because of the firm opposition of established professional practitioners with vested interests.

The complexity of the evolution represented in this model also explains why present-day opinions may diverge on the subject of the emancipation of elites. It all depends on the point of view of the investigator: whence he looks and in what direction.

Let us take an example. In the Netherlands there is a famous old weigh-house in the little town of Oudewater, province of Holland.[22] This weigh-house derives its fame from the fact that the balance suspended in its main room on the ground floor served for at least a century as an official weighing instrument for witches. People accused of maleficent witchcraft could go or be sent to Oudewater to be

weighed by town officials. In the case of a woman, the town's midwife verified that she was naked under the veil covering her and did not carry any weights. After the weighing procedure a certificate was prepared giving the person's exact weight and stating that it was in accordance with the natural complexion of the subject's body. Although the local historian Nicholas Borremans pretended in 1657 that the witches' balance was of an earlier time and that many witches from Germany had been weighed, the first mention of a certificate delivered by the weigh-master to a presumed witch dates from 1644, the last from 1754, and with few exceptions all the persons accused of witchcraft were of Dutch origin. Between these two dates, somewhere between twelve and seventeen certificates (some of them still conserved in judicial archives) had been delivered to people accused of being witches. Although they were mainly single women (fifteen altogether), in 1729 a married couple was sent to the balance by the sheriff of the neighboring village of Meerkerk.

The cognitive meaning of this weighing act is quite clear. It is an ordeal, and pertains as such to the magical order. However, the intellectual background of the procedure is not the worldview of traditional witchcraft, but that of demonology made popular. This perhaps explains the rather late emergence of the practice, considering that witches had been burned in the northern Netherlands as early as the second half of the fifteenth century.[23] Demonologists believed that the devil changed the weight of a witch; when taking a man or woman into his power, he drew the substance out of the body and filled it with his own immaterial presence. Thus, a person of normal weight could not be in the power of the devil. She (or he) would be thus cleared by the outcome of the weighing procedure and released.

Contemporary critics of the magic universe were aware of the essentially magical character of the weighing practice at Oudewater. They were embarrassed by its survival,[24] even though it was a much safer means for a witch to be discharged than, for example, the ordeal by water. (That ordeal was still practiced here and there in the Netherlands despite the issuance on January 9, 1594, of an official statement of the medical and philosophical—but not the theological or legal—faculties of Leiden University rejecting its value as legal proof, since natural factors could explain the floating of the body.)[25] In his much-discussed book *The Enchanted World* (1691–93), the Reformed minister Balthasar Bekker quoted the Oudewater practice as a typical example of a superstitious belief.[26] But a century later

things had changed. The fundamental distinction between the magic universe and demonology, the latter pertaining to the spiritual realm of orderly religion, was no longer perceived by authors of the intellectual elite. Without distinction, both magic and the devil's intervention in our physical world were rejected as superstitious beliefs, from which the Dutch elites had been emancipated long before. In 1828 Jacobus Scheltema's famous book on the Dutch witch trials stated their early cessation in the northern Netherlands and used this argument to celebrate the precocity of enlightened toleration among the Dutch elite.[27] Scheltema himself, an avowed admirer of Balthasar Bekker,[28] clearly had been emancipated from both the magical and religious universes; his approach is unashamedly rationalistic.

From Scheltema's work until well after Second World War, the witches' balance of Oudewater gained a proverbial celebrity as an example of the precocious emancipation of Dutch bourgeois elites from the magic universe, symbolized here by witchcraft.[29] A German professor of communication science, Kurt Baschwitz, himself a refugee in Holland from Nazi persecution, made a case of Oudewater in his book on early modern witchcraft, where the magnificent example of Dutch toleration is celebrated on nearly every page.[30] Ignoring the exact identity of the persons who went to Oudewater, Ivo Schöffer could even pretend as late as 1973 that the weighing practice concerned mostly foreigners—a supplementary proof that Holland not only had enlightened judges, but that the common people of the Dutch Republic had likewise outgrown the belief in witchcraft.[31] Looking back to these perceptions and interpretations with the help of our model, however, we can see that, notwithstanding their authors' claim, it is not the cognitive but the social dimension of the phenomenon that matters to them. What counts for Schöffer, as for Baschwitz, is not the practice of weighing and its cognitive status, but the juridical value and the social acceptance of the liberating certificate of the weigh-master.

In one case, however, we know a bit more. In the village of Eibergen, on the eastern border of the province of Gelderland, a married woman called Aaltje Brouwers was in 1694 suspected of witchcraft by her neighbors.[32] Desiring to clear herself, she asked for the ordeal by water. Such ordeals seem to have occurred rather frequently in the district, mostly on the responsibility of the local community, not of the official judicial authorities. The latter already used a different rationality;[33] ordeals had been formally forbidden in the course of the seventeenth century by several bailiffs of that

region, in addition to having been rejected by Leiden University a hundred years earlier. In any case, the proof was carried out nearby in the small town of Borculo and the woman was formally cleared by the community. But in her neighborhood the suspicion remained alive. Thereupon she went to Oudewater to get a certificate, which was delivered on September 25, 1694. We know from that certificate that she was a blonde with blue eyes, 45 years old, rather tall, and that her weight was exactly 100 pounds. Having returned home, she was apparently no longer bothered by the neighbors, but she was now in questionable standing with the Reformed church council. The ministers of the district's presbytery examined her case in October 1695, declared that she had sinned by taking part at Oudewater in "idle and useless trials," and excluded her from the Lord's Supper.

Here we are back at the cognitive pole. What bothered the presbytery was not the community standards, nor even the happy outcome of the two ordeals for the poor woman, but the intellectual organization of the minds of the faithful. Both the ordeal by water and the practice of weighing pertained in the eyes of the Reformed ministers to the magical order, opposed to true religion. Indeed, both tried to cancel the accusation of magic by a countermagical ritual. From that point of view, the burgomasters of Oudewater who maintained the witches' balance until far into the eighteenth century had not at all emancipated themselves from the magic universe, as recent historical opinion has claimed; rather, they actively perpetuated it.

Three Intellectual Attitudes

The basic lines of evolution may now be somewhat sharper. We may assume that in the beginning the greater part of the population, if not all, was bound to the magical worldview. This view was inner-worldly; it worked by analogy and sympathy.[34] Witchcraft, for example, may be seen as an inner-worldly network of notions and practices with an explanatory value due precisely to the coherence (intellectual, functional, symbolic, or otherwise) of its constituent parts. Taking part in that network, the population of town and countryside—in the northern Netherlands witchcraft was as common among townspeople as among villagers—could understand it as meaningful and deal with otherwise unexplained fears, or with wondrous events the origin of which they could not imagine.

With late medieval scholasticism, followed by early modern humanism, a second stage begins. From a profoundly skeptical attitude

toward magic, theologians created another cognitive explanatory model involving not only this earthly world but the other world as well. Here the devil enters. In the Netherlands, Louvain theologians like Hendrik van Gorcum and the Black Friar and inquisitor Jacob Van Hoogstraten took an active part in elaborating this new worldview. According to Hoogstraten, magic (in particular witchcraft) was idle, but the devil could make it effective by employing natural effects with which he is better acquainted than are human beings.[35] We may call this the Aristotelian shift toward a more rationally organized worldview. Through the educational efforts of the Modern Devotion and Dutch humanism it was quickly assimilated by the Dutch elites.[36] However, this new metaphysics involved a new, supranatural causality—the devil's direct control of natural forces—and created de facto a new territory of the unknown and of fear that could revive a helpless people's recourse to magic.

In this new worldview we may discern three currents among the Netherlands intelligentsia, currents that in the early sixteenth century develop into large streams. The first current did not involve large numbers of intellectuals at the beginning, but it included some excellent and influential writers. It represents the skeptical position of Erasmus (c. 1469–1536) and his friends. In his *Colloquia* Erasmus refuses to take seriously any form of magic (be it witchcraft or astrology, alchemy or divination), rejects the intermediate practices between magic and religion, such as the ritual acts and gestures related to the invocation of the saints, and is prone to dissent from the sheer possibility of supernatural intervention in earthly matters. Together with the *Laus Stultitiae*, his Dialogues even make fun of all those forms of devotion that pretend to establish contact with heaven: indulgences, conjurations, pilgrimages, votive offerings, and belief in miracles.[37] Erasmus storms at religious magic as much as at popular superstition. His worldview tends to move directly from the magical to the secular, omitting the stage of religion. His own religion is marked by an inner-worldly, nonmagical faith that refuses to accept the influence of the supernatural in the physical world. The only bond between God and man is the Word, the Word made Man.

In the second current we recognize mainly the educated Catholic and Protestant clergy with pastoral duties, feeling responsible for the simple folk and determined to impose upon them through education the principles of true Christian belief and practice. A part of the clergy, the importance of which still has to be established, aimed at the peaceful elimination of the fear of supernatural intervention

and developed another explanatory system that linked supranatural agency to inner-worldly causality. A fine example of such a clergyman was the Catholic village priest Jacob Vallick, who lived from about 1510 to 1580.[38] The son of a priest (who was his predecessor) and the father of another priest, he was a good and careful rector of his flock and rather near to the Erasmian mind. In 1559 he published a little treatise entitled *Tooveren, wat dat voor een werc is* [lit. Practicing magic: what that means], which was soon translated into German. Written in the form of a lively dialogue between villagers, it was very similar to the two treatises that George Gifford, a cleric with moderate puritan ideas, published some 30 years later in England.[39] It probably was meant to be used during the Sunday sessions of catechism. (Vallick was one of the first Catholic priests in his country to organize these, as we know from another source.)[40]

Vallick follows Erasmus in his radically skeptical attitude toward magic and opposes himself violently to the countermagical rituals practiced by cunning men, in particular by the monks of neighboring monasteries. But unlike Erasmus, he accepts the reality of supernatural intervention. The devil (he says in substance) uses the appearance of witchcraft as a cover for the ordinary people. Underneath he acts through the person of the witch, but always in a natural way—for example, by poisoning cattle with an ordinary, terrestrial herb. We know from different sources that Vallick, who was a well-educated cleric, knowing Latin and French and acting as a public notary, also practiced some forms of medicine. He claims in his treatise to be able to heal devilish harm by employing natural remedies, not in a magical way, but as sanctioned by God in the Bible, such as the smoke of the burning liver of a pike that cured Tobias by chasing away the demons (Tob. 6:7–8). The important point, however, is Vallick's attitude, not his ideology; his pastoral care is marked by the desire to reassure his flock and to explain what happens.[41] In this he occupies an intermediate position between two sorts of intellectual, both more interested in what they consider the truth than in the transmission of it to the simple folk: the utterly skeptical Erasmians and the headstrong demonologists of the old church and the new.

Owing to his paramedical activity, Vallick, who lived in a Dutch parish of the duchy of Cleves, was bound to clash with another famous opponent of witchcraft, Johan Wier (1515–88) or, in German, Weyer. Weyer, first as a physician in the town of Arnhem in Gelderland and then as court physician to the duke of neighboring Cleves, lived only a few miles away from Groessen, Vallick's village.[42] In his

book *De praestigiis daemonum*, published for the first time in 1563 (that is, four years after Vallick's treatise), Weyer attacks the priest violently as an ignorant man who practices medicine without being qualified to do so, and who uses (counter-) magical techniques, such as saying mass upon the belly of a possessed nun in a monastery at Arnhem.[43] Professional competition was thus added to diverging views on magic and religion. Weyer represents indeed the third current, that of the substitution of religion for magic. Weyer, his supporters, and his opponents, such as Jean Bodin, were mainly university-educated professionals (physicians, lawyers, judges, and some church officials) who shared the same cultural universe and used similar intellectual categories. They saw supernatural intervention in human life as the main constituent of magic and stressed the need to eradicate such forms of intervention in order to prevent magic and destroy the magic universe. Hence their claim to replace magic with religion. Until very recently, Weyer was considered a champion of toleration because he refused to take witchcraft seriously, thought witches mentally ill (suffering from pathological melancholy) and advised princes not to burn them. During the last few decades, however, research has brought forward another image of Weyer, one that stresses his violent defense of demonology and of the reality of devilish intervention in terrestrial matters. In fact, it appears that Weyer simply replaced magic with an austere religion. He was an active prosecutor who demanded severe penalties for any intention to make a pact or have intercourse with the devil.[44] A Glorious Revolution of the Dutch?

These three currents, with their particular attitudes toward magic and demonology—the skeptical or secular, the pastoral or biblical, and the interventionist or professional—symbolized here in three sixteenth-century authors, emerge by and large in all contemporary intellectual debates on religious matters. Each of the three currents conducts large groups of educated Dutch men (and perhaps likewise women, but their feelings are still generally ignored) along a specific way to emancipation from the magic universe. They pass in different degrees and follow different rhythms through the assimilation of the Aristotelian worldview and its replacement by the Galilean-Newtonian worldview.[45] During this process, they reject magic to different extents. Together with the magical order, a certain image of the devil, seen as a big sorcerer with human-like attributes, vanishes. But at the same time the supporters of at least two of the intellectual currents adopt another, much more powerful image of the devil, as

the great opponent of God himself—so powerful that he does not even need to use witchcraft but can intervene directly in physical reality.

While a Dutch artist like Jacques de Gheyn II (1565–1629) represented in his sketches and paintings a mixture of traditional sorcery and learned devilish witchcraft (perhaps more in a Flemish than in a Dutch pictorial tradition),[46] Dutch writers from the first half of the seventeenth century, such as the poet Joost Van den Vondel, wrote amused and skeptical poems on witches. Meanwhile, two currents continued to divide the Calvinist ministers and, as far as we know, even the remaining Catholic clergy. The first current, represented by the influential divine and popular chronicler Willem Baudartius (1565–1640)[47] and the great theologian Gysbert Voetius (1589–1679), rejected magic as superstition but took the devil quite seriously. Voetius attributed the apparent effects of magical action to hallucination or imagination, but he believed in the eventualities of pacts and sexual intercourse with the devil and of contact between this world and the other.[48] Refusing, however, a too credulous attitude, the Voetians—one remembers that the Catholic apostolic vicar, Philippus Rovenius (1574–1651), held a similar view[49]—called for the demonstration of the reality of such a pact or of sexual relations with the devil, through a formal judicial procedure. We may recognize here the demonologist tradition exemplified in Weyer's works, although the real influence of Weyer in the Dutch Republic seems to have been rather slight. But the social effects of this intellectual tradition were softened by the critical attitude of Dutch magistrates toward spiritual agency (*maleficium*) as a motive for prosecution.[50] Anyhow, even the Calvinist clergy did not really prosecute witchcraft through systematic action of the consistory. Most divines did not go beyond including the topic of magic in the customary Sunday cycle of sermons on the Heidelberg catechism.[51]

The other current may be represented by two Mennonite laymen, the Haarlem linen draper Abraham Palingh (c. 1588–1682) and the Hoorn bookseller Jan Jansz. Deutel (d. 1705).[52] In their two treatises—*'t Afgerukt Mom-aansight der Tooverye* by Palingh (Amsterdam, 1659) and *Een kort tractaetje tegen de toovery* by Deutel (Hoorn, 1670)—magic is denounced on biblical grounds as a deceit and sorcerers as impostors, but the power of the devil is likewise denied. Deutel thinks it un-Christian to claim that God would operate through the devil. Palingh advances, more or less implicitly, some metaphysical grounds for denying the eventuality of a real pact with the devil—namely, what God has created is bound to conserve its

own substance; therefore, man will never be able to fly in the air and the devil will never be able to adopt a human body. Again we find here face-to-face the militant or professional attitude and the biblical point of view.

But, in a second phase of the intellectual evolution, a final shift in the cognitive order was needed for the Dutch elites to bid farewell to the magic universe and its demonological successors. Substantially this shift took place in the time of William and Mary.[53] There is no need to recall here the importance of the previous Dutch debate on Cartesianism and the mathematical-deductive method for the attack on Aristotelianism.[54] Descartes separated physics radically from metaphysics, but he did not leave much space for religious perception of the universe. The second stage in this great revision of the intellectual worldview offered more openness to religious feelings and has exerted much more influence in the field of our theme. That stage was the introduction, through the works of Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton (whose *Principia mathematica* was published in 1687), of the experimental-inductive method. What we may now call the Newtonian worldview was reflected in three major discussions involving different aspects of the old magical order, discussions that took place in Holland in the 1680's and 1690's and had European echoes.

The first debate concerned the significance of comets and was brought about by the sighting of the comets of 1680–82. This was not the first discussion on comets, but it was the first that was won by the new science, represented by Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), then a professor of philosophy at the illustrious school of Rotterdam, with his *Pensées diverses sur la comète qui parut en 1680*.[55]

The second debate was about the meaning of prophecy. The Haarlem Mennonite physician and preacher Anthonie Van Dale (1638–1708) wrote in 1683 a Latin treatise, *De oraculis ethnicorum dissertationes duae*, which was translated into Dutch in 1687. The French philosopher Fontenelle leaned heavily on Van Dale's work and popularized his ideas through the *Histoire des oracles* (1686–87).[56] Questioned whether the oracles of the pagans had become superfluous after the coming of Christ, Van Dale demonstrated that the pagan tradition of oracles had been falsely assimilated by Christianity and that in fact all divine prophecy was made by man and therefore was pure superstition. Because Van Dale rid his worldview of the last remnants of demonology, some Dutch Christians thought his intellectual position to be that of an atheist. In fact, Fontenelle introduced

in his adaptation of Van Dale's treatise a totally different perspective, which made his book more acceptable in the realm of the Most Christian King. Whereas Van Dale rejected both prophecy and magic, Fontenelle made a distinction between the two and admitted that the devil, not man, could be responsible for magic and witchcraft. Needless to say, Van Dale could only deny that the original version of his work could have suggested such an opinion.[57]

The third and most violent debate concerned demonology. Again, it was substantially a Dutch debate, though largely shared by intellectuals throughout Western Europe because of the translation into several European languages of the incriminated work *De betoverde weereld* (The enchanted world), published in 1691–93. Instigator of the quarrel was its author, Balthasar Bekker (1634–98), then a Calvinist minister at Amsterdam. In his book he quoted numerous examples of magical beliefs and actions he had encountered earlier.[58] When a minister at Franeker, a small university town in Friesland, Bekker had observed some cases of sorcery, witchcraft, and diabolic possession, including two cases of sexual impotence, one of a soldier and another of a student, both apparently caused by a prostitute and ascribed to the devil.[59] In none of these cases did Bekker look for supernatural explanations. On the contrary, he systematically analyzed each case, seeking tangible facts that would support an explanation in the domain of physical causality.[60] In his conclusion he denied any influence of the otherworldly on this reality. Any apparent physical or even mental correspondence between the two worlds was an illusion, a fraud. The devil, insisted Bekker, had been banished to hell, where he would remain. Wanting to save God's absolute sovereignty, Bekker denied him any intercession in the affairs of our world and exiled him to heaven. Bekker was attacked with rare violence by his fellow divines. Perhaps that violence was due not so much to Bekker's ideas as to his refusal to share their pastoral concern about the beliefs of the masses, still imbued by the magic universe. From his opponents' perspective, was this more a professional than an ideological fight?

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this threefold shift in the intellectual organization of the Dutch elites' worldview. Though it took several more decades to be assimilated by the intellectual elites as a whole,[61] the critical approach long ago announced by the skeptical, Erasmian tradition had won a decisive victory. Here indeed was a Glorious Revolution of the mind. Refusing any supernatural influence in the three main sectors of the old magical world-

view—astrology, prophecy, and witchcraft—Pierre Bayle, Anthonie Van Dale, and Balthasar Bekker—citizens of three major towns of Holland—together brought about a final return to inner-worldly causality, but this time in the physical order, not the magical. Magic is fantasy, wrote the court chaplain, Petrus Van Balen (1643–90), in 1684. And, he added, "true logic" has to guide theology and the explanation of the world.[62] Not only magic, but also metaphysics, colored by a religious perception of the world, was definitely banished as an explanatory system for the world's order.

At the end of the seventeenth century, everywhere in the northern Netherlands, judicial prosecution of magic comes to an end. Henceforth civil offenses—that is, deceit or slander, not witchcraft or sorcery—are the only crimes prosecuted.[63] Typical is the attitude of four young, university-educated travelers passing through the town of Zutphen in Gelderland in 1740. In the old library built in Catholic times in the former collegiate church, their guide shows them some marks of a dog's feet in the flagged floor, interpreted by a local legend as the devil's feet. The four young men refuse to believe the story. They poke fun at the credulous people and suspect the priests of past centuries of having laid the flagstones there in order to make the people believe that "the devil had danced there at night and purged the library of all the Beggar's [Calvinist] books."[64] For nearly a full century, the elite—that is, judges, physicians, authors of moral literature, Protestant consistories, and presbyteries—ceased to interfere with people's beliefs and to impose social control on intellectual attitudes. It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the battle against superstition was reactivated, based perhaps on a new feeling of national unity and certainly on a new ethnological view of the "people" and their place in the national community.[65] That does not mean that no further attempts were made to reconcile religion to the new science. On the contrary, the story of physico-theology, inaugurated in the Netherlands by the bestseller *Het regt gebruik der wereltbeschouwingen* (Amsterdam, 1715; English translation: *The Religious Philosopher; or, the Right Use of Contemplating the Works of the Creator*, London, 1718), by the Purmerend burgomaster Bernard Nieuwentyt (1654–1718), was yet to begin. But the main questions were settled.[66]

It was not until these outlines of the new worldview were achieved that the northern Netherlands were, technically but also mentally, ready for a real unification of time in their country, as a symbolic mark of new universal, inner-worldly precision; in 1699–1700 the

provinces, which, unlike Holland and Zeeland, had conserved the Julian calendar, decided to forego eleven days and so place their calendar on equal terms with that of the leading province.

Certainly all this does not mean that from that very moment sorcery was not practiced anymore or that magical beliefs disappeared or that popular and learned prophecy had become incredible, even among the elites. Among theologians demonology suffered a long agony. The Dutch Old Catholic doctor, Anton de Haen (1704–76), court physician to the empress Maria Theresa, published in 1774 at Vienna a study, *De magia*, in which he ridiculed magical beliefs but voiced an apology for demonology as an explanatory model for children's possession.[67] At the local community level the process of the disenchantment of the world was still going on. The everyday behavioral routine of most people and the acceptance of the new worldview by the community—that is, the two other dimensions of the model proposed above—still had far to go. During the whole eighteenth century, various calamities—repeated cattle plagues, large-scale inundations, the Lisbon earthquake in 1755, the disastrous destruction by fire of the Amsterdam theatre in 1772—were interpreted by ministers and other pious writers as directly caused by God's punishing hand.[68] Spiritual agency as an origin of the world's disorder still survived among some of the educated people and the intellectual elites. But the basic conditions had changed. As an explanatory framework for the human and social order, the magic universe had definitely lost its credibility for all educated men and women. The devil was back in hell. Even eschatology became much more a science of this world than of the other.[69]